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SUBJECT: MONTENEGRIN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: THE CONDUCT OF THE  
CAMPAIGN TO DATE

REF: PODGORICA 93 AND PREVIOUS

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Montenegro will hold presidential elections April 6. Despite initial lack of clarity on electoral legislation, observers believe the voter registry is solid and that political party oversight, procedural safeguards, and domestic and international observers will adequately ensure the integrity of the vote. The opposition has accused the ruling party of abusing state resources and purchasing IDs to prevent citizens from voting and has complained of media bias and inadequate campaign financing. OSCE/ODIHR mission has reported a "slight" bias in state media toward the incumbent, but has been unable to substantiate the allegations of ID buying. Overall, the candidates have focused on substantive issues and the campaign has witnessed fewer accusations of violations than in recent elections. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Montenegro will hold presidential elections April 6, with a runoff on April 20 if no candidate gets more than 50 percent in the first round. According to a March 14-20 poll conducted by the CEDEM think tank, incumbent President Vujanovic of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) is supported by 52.8 percent of voters (an increase of more than four percent from CEDEM's February poll). Andrija Mandic of the Serbian People's Party (SNS) has moved into second place, with 19.1 percent (up from 14.8 percent in February), just ahead of Nebojsa Medojevic of the Movement for Change (PzP), who has 18.3 percent support (21.2 percent in February). Srdjan Milic of the Socialist People's Party (SNP) trails with 9.8 percent (9.9 percent in the February poll).

Lack of Legislation Causes Initial Confusion...

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13. (U) The campaign got off to an uncertain start in January when Parliament failed to pass legislation defining voter eligibility and campaign financing. Parliament's failure until March 19 to elect a quorum to the Public Broadcasting Service Council also prevented that body from adopting regulations governing state media's coverage of the campaign. In the absence of these laws and regulations, the campaign has been conducted under existing legislation, some of which has been criticized as ambiguous (but which the ODIHR mission has assessed as sufficient according to international standards).

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¶4. (SBU) Despite some unhappiness over the election's legislative framework, most observers have expressed few concerns about the quality of Montenegro's voter registry and the competence and objectivity of its electoral administration. ODIHR told us the registry, which consists of 489,894 individuals, was solid. (Note: All individuals listed as of September 2006 -- the last parliamentary election -- may vote). In addition, according to ODIHR, election commissions were transparent and had met all deadlines. Opposition candidates were expected to place representatives on the 21 municipal commissions and the boards of 1,141 polling stations; ODIHR believes political party controls and other procedural safeguards will ensure the basic integrity of the vote.

¶5. (U) ODIHR will field 120 short-term and 14 long-term monitors (in country since early March). Embassies are contributing another 14 observers to ODIHR; together with a handful of Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe representatives and other OSCE staff, about 175 foreign monitors will deploy throughout Montenegro. They will be joined by approximately 500 observers from the NGO the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), which will conduct a Parallel Vote Tabulation from about 200 polling stations (Note: CDT's election activities are funded by NED). Another NGO, the Center for Monitoring (CEMI), may also field observers.

#### Concerns About the Campaign

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¶6. (SBU) While few expect fraud on election day, political parties have raised the following concerns:

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-- Abuse of state resources: The opposition has charged that President Vujanovic is using his office to further his campaign. SNP MP Aleksandar Damjanovic told us Vujanovic had stepped up presidential activities since the start of the campaign, and SNS Deputy Leader Goran Danilovic complained that the President was using state transport (such as a helicopter) to travel to campaign rallies.

-- Bias in state media: The opposition charges that RTCG has devoted more time to Vujanovic. They also complain about the lack of TV debates (RTCG will hold its only debate on April 3, and Damjanovic told us a private TV station cancelled a planned debate between deputies of the candidates after the DPS backed out). Medojevic told the Ambassador that some media were unfairly raising rates -- a TV station in Bijelo Polje increased its advertising fees 20-fold since the campaign started.

-- Inadequate financing: Parliament allocated 400,000 euros to be divided equally among candidates receiving at least five percent of the vote (the opposition lobbied in vain for the 2.7 million euros available for parliamentary elections). Opposition representatives complain that the 100,000 euros each candidate will get is not enough. Danilovic charged that Vujanovic had spent well in excess of 250,000 euros on TV ads, while his candidate (Mandic) had to take bank loans. On March 30, RTCG announced it would no longer run Medojevic's ads since the PzP already owed the station 200,000 euros.

-- Illegal Purchase of IDs: PzP and SNS have alleged that individuals associated with the DPS are purchasing or "renting" voters' identity documents in order to prevent them from voting, and possibly in order to photo sub the documents. Danilovic claimed that 10,000 IDs had been purchased, and offered to provide us with the names of some individuals involved. Medojevic told the Ambassador that Safet Kalic, a suspected mafia kingpin from Rozaje, had given the DPS five million Euros to support the Vujanovic campaign (including, presumably, to purchase IDs). On March 26, the PzP submitted to the Chief State Prosecutor the names of three individuals who they claimed were buying IDs.

#### ODIHR, NGOs Downplay ID Purchase

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¶7. (SBU) An ODIHR representative and CDT director Marko Canovic told us they were looking closely at the "difficult" question of whether Vujanovic was using state resources to further his campaign. However, both said they had yet to see convincing evidence of ID buying. For one thing, Canovic told us, voters can still cast their ballots after presenting a passport or driver's license. The ODIHR representative said the SNS claimed to have a list of seven individuals with knowledge of ID buying, but declined to share their names. (Note: SNS representatives have told us they lack confidence in ODIHR, which they claim ignored fraud during the May 2006 independence referendum.)

#### "Slight" Media Bias for Incumbent

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¶8. (SBU) ODIHR media monitors reported March 24 that RTCG "slightly favors" Vujanovic, who received 33.8 percent of coverage of candidates, with Milic (23.8), Medojevic (22.2), and Mandic (20.1) trailing. (Note: these figures refer only to campaign coverage; they do not include coverage of Vujanovic's presidential activities.) Private broadcaster IN TV, which competes with RTCG for ratings, was more biased, devoting 47.2 percent of its coverage to Vujanovic, with Medojevic, Mandic, and Milic getting 22.4, 19.3, and 11.1 percent, respectively. ODIHR noted, however, that all candidates had received significant coverage overall and had freely purchased airtime, and several newspapers (such as Dan and Vijesti) were supporting opposition candidates.

#### Campaign Rhetoric Relatively Positive

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¶9. (SBU) ODIHR, CDT, and veteran observers report that the campaign has been orderly and relatively civil. In contrast to previous elections, which were dominated by the single question of independence, candidates are mostly running issue-based campaigns focusing on pensions, wages, education, health care, corruption, and (to some extent) minority rights. A partial exception has been Vujanovic, who -- while vowing to continue the economic improvements of the past few years -- has made his party's support for Montenegrin statehood, and the other candidates' opposition to independence, a centerpiece of his campaign. All candidates profess support for European integration -- several, especially Medojevic, argue that by cleaning up corruption they can integrate Montenegro into Europe faster than Vujanovic -- while Mandic (and to a lesser degree

Milic) has been seeking to capitalize on widespread opposition to Kosovo's independence.

Comment

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¶10. (SBU) Despite legislative deficiencies and some apparent violations, this campaign has contained a number of positive developments. First of all, it has been vigorous, with all candidates reaching out to large public audiences virtually every day. In addition, the voter registry seems to be no longer a major concern, there is widespread confidence in the country's electoral administration, and election day fraud is considered unlikely. Furthermore, there have been fewer claims of pressure on public sector employees and voters in general (to support the DPS candidate) than in years past, and candidates are focusing more on issues than complaints about violations. Allegations of ID buying are very serious, but have so far been unsubstantiated. On the negative side of the ledger, media coverage appears to have been somewhat skewed and the lack of public debates between candidates is a concern. CDT has reported on the defacing of a number of billboards, most belonging to Mandic. The DPS-controlled Parliament's decision to allocate only 400,000 euros to candidates clearly benefits Vujanovic.

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